

## THE INVENTIVE SLOPERS

John Mathews

Joseph Sloper described his occupation as “painter” at the 1841 Census, as “house decorator” in 1851, as “decorator & builder” in 1861, and as “land owner” at the 1871 Census. On his death certificate in 1890, he was described as a “civil engineer”. At the 1881 Census, no occupation was given, and there must be some doubt as to whether the census enumerator actually saw Joseph on Census night, as the ages of the house occupants were all shown originally as “N.K.” which was later crossed out and vastly incorrect ages inserted. There is also the enumerator’s annotation “refer to memo book” - if only one had access to this!

However, on the photo of Joseph taken in 1873, when he was 60 years old, (see Bulletin No. 329, April 2004, page 6), the annotation reads “Joseph Sloper/inventor, London”. Perfin collectors know Joseph as being the inventor of perforating devices which were used on cheques, railway tickets, stamps, hat bands, etc.

The British patent for perforating devices was number “1985” of 1858, the application having been filed on 1 September 1857. The machine was intended to be used for cheque protection. In 1868, Joseph Sloper patented a perforating machine for railway tickets (English Patent No 2741/68) and further, his patent No 643/69 from 1869 described an advanced machine "for perforating paper, etc. employing a stripper and embodying interchangeable heads, allowing choice of design" - e.g., for stamp dies? On 4 March 1871, Joseph Sloper, describing himself as a civil engineer, made application number 115,989 to the United States Patent Office to be granted a patent for his “Improvement in Hand-Stamps”, primarily those for dating railway tickets and coupons. (see Bulletin No. 348, June 2007, pages 23-26).

Readers may not be aware of other patented inventions of members of the Sloper family.

In the “Chronological Index of Patents Applied for and Patents Granted, for the year 1857” by Bennet Woodcroft, the entry for

British Patent Application number 2734 of 1857 reads “JOSEPH SLOPER, of Oxford Street, in the County of Middlesex, Builder and Decorator, for an invention for — ‘Improved means of, and apparatus for obtaining, motive-power for propelling ships or driving machinery’. Letters patent sealed.” This would seem to be on a vastly different scale to his perforating devices!

Four of Joseph’s sons worked in the family business – Joseph Lavell Leete Sloper, Horace Sloper, Percy Sloper and Eustace Sloper – all of whom were described as civil engineers in various documents. On 7 April 1925, the United States Patent Office granted patent number 1,533,042 to Percy Sloper, of London, England, for a Burner for Burning Fuel Oil. Percy summarised his invention thus:

“This invention relates to pressure or gravity fed burners for burning oil fuel, paraffin and other liquid fuels, especially heavy oils such as are used in ranges, furnaces, boilers and for other purposes, and to that class of burners in which the fuel oil and air or gas meet just inside the outlet nozzle through which the mixture passes for burning, and has for its object to construct such a burner wherein the oil is perfectly atomized and which is economical and reliable in use, especially when the burner is turned down to reduce the size of flame and heating power.”